

# Restrained, rebuked, and redirected by the risen Lord Jesus

Acts 26:1-32

*Keith Morris*

Once known as U.S. President Richard Nixon's "hatchet man," Charles W. Colson boasted "I would walk over my own grandmother" to ensure the reelection of President Nixon.<sup>1</sup> During the days of the Watergate break-in scandal, his "dirty political tricks" eventually caught up with him, and Colson pled guilty to obstruction of justice and served seven months in a maximum-security prison. During that time, he converted to Christianity through the testimony of a friend and on reading C. S. Lewis' *Mere Christianity*. His daughter Emily Colson described her Dad as "a transformed man." "My Dad [was] radically different [she said]—a new heart, a new creation in Christ!" Colson left prison in 1975, committed to taking the Gospel to prisoners and their families, and initiated the Christian Prison Fellowship.<sup>2</sup> Colson, the dirty tricks artist, was **restrained** by judicial justice, **rebuked** by the Holy Spirit for his unbelief, and "his huge drive, intellect, and maniacal energy" was **redirected** from the service of Richard Nixon to the service of Jesus Christ.

Another "hatchet man" named Saul was **restrained** in his vicious, maniacal persecution of the early church by the appearance of the Risen and Ascended Lord Jesus. The Lord **rebuked** him for his stubborn unbelief and **redirected** him to become the missionary and apostle Paul, a bond-slave of the Lord Jesus Christ. In **Acts 26**, Paul tells his story before the Roman Governor Festus and Judean King Agrippa II.

**Paul** was at that time a political prisoner under Roman protective custody in the coastal city of Caesarea. The Jewish Counsel in Jerusalem had called him to trial for supposedly having brought a Gentile with him into the Jewish Temple, and for declaring in the name of Jesus of Nazareth "**. . . the hope and resurrection of the dead!**" (Acts 23:6).

The Jews wanted the **Roman Governor Festus** to return Paul to Jerusalem for trial there. But secretly, they plotted to ambush and kill Paul on the way (Acts 25:3). Paul, **a Roman citizen by birth**, told Governor Festus: "**. . . if none of those things is true of which these men accuse me, no one can hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar.**" (Acts 25:11-12) NASB.

---

<sup>1</sup> Michael Dobbs, "Charles Colson, Nixon's 'dirty tricks' man, dies at 80." *Washington Post*, April 21, 2012, "Democracy Dies in Darkness."

<sup>2</sup> Breakpoint Colson Center Web Page, "About Chuck Colson," accessed January 2, 2024, <https://breakpoint.org/>

Paul's **appeal to Caesar** the Emperor in Rome was the equivalent of saying, "I don't want to undergo trial by the Jews in Jerusalem. I appeal to the Supreme Court in Rome." Paul's appeal to Caesar eventually sent him to Rome on what is called his Fourth Missionary Journey.

Shortly after, **King Agrippa II** and his sister **Bernice** came to visit Governor Festus. Agrippa was the Roman king over the larger Jewish area of Judea. He was the last of the Herod line of kings, appointed by Rome, and he knew a lot about the Jewish religion and practices. Festus mentioned Paul's case to him, and King Agrippa asked to hear Paul.

**Setting** – Paul, in chains as political prisoner in protective custody, is given a hearing before the pagan Roman Governor, and the secular Judean King.

**The next day**, King Agrippa, Bernice, and Festus, *"accompanied by the commanders and the prominent men of the city"*, gathered together, and . . . *"at the command of Festus, Paul was brought in."* (Acts 25:23)

*"Agrippa said to Paul, 'You are permitted to speak for yourself.' Then Paul stretched out his hand and proceeded to make his defense."* (Acts 26:1-18) NASB.

Paul narrates his defense **in three parts**: His life before knowing Christ; How he came to know the Lord personally; and His life after knowing Christ.

Paul respectfully addressed the King and introduced himself as having been a Pharisee according to the strictest sect of the Jews, a Pharisee who believed in the hope of the promise of God –that being the resurrection and eternal life.

He then tells of his life **before** Christ:

*"So then, I thought to myself that I had to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And this is just what I did in Jerusalem; not only did I lock up many of the saints in prisons, having received authority from the chief priests, but also when they were being put to death I cast my vote against them. And as I punished them often in all the synagogues, I tried to force them to blaspheme; and being furiously enraged at them, I kept pursuing them even to foreign cities."* (Acts 26:9-11)

The phrase *"being furiously enraged at them"* bears the meaning "behave as a maniac" "locked in the frenzy of rage (fury)," "completely irrational."<sup>3</sup>

**How** did Paul come to know the Lord personally?

*"While so engaged as I was journeying to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests, at midday, O King, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining all around me and those who were journeying with me. And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew dialect, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.'" And I said, 'Who are You, Lord?' And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.'<sup>16</sup> But get up and stand on your feet; for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the*

---

<sup>3</sup> Helps Word-Studies 1692, *being furious*, Bible Hub, <https://biblehub.com/greek/1692.htm>.

*things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you; <sup>17</sup> rescuing you from the Jewish people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you, <sup>18</sup> to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.”* (Acts 26:12-18)

**The splendor of light from heaven**, brighter than the sun, that appeared to Saul, was the risen Lord Jesus. With His blinding appearance, He arrested and **restrained** Saul in his headlong rush to persecute the Christians in Damascus. The voice that spoke identified Himself, saying, *“I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.”*

This was the same risen and glorified Jesus that appeared to John on the Island of Patmos, as John recorded in Revelation 1:16b-17 – *“. . . and His face was like the sun shining in its strength. When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man.”*

By His appearance in blinding light, Jesus **restrained** Saul and stopped him in his tracks. At the time, Paul was known by his **Hebrew name “Saul.”** Jesus **calls Saul out as** a persecutor of those persons who believed in Him, and consequently, a persecutor of Jesus Himself.

*“Why are you persecuting Me?”* Jesus asked Saul. Then He **rebuked** him for his stubborn unbelief. *“It is hard for you to kick against the goads”* (Acts 26:14b). In effect, He said, “You, Saul, a Pharisee, know **the Scriptures** –and the Scriptures point to Me. You’ve seen and known and heard the testimonies of Christians **like Stephen**, whom you stood by and watched stoned to death. Those Scriptures and those testimonies are poking your conscience and your mind and your heart like the pointed sticks called **goads** that farmers use to prod the oxen as they pull a load, and **just as irrationally** as the oxen resist by kicking against those goads, you are resisting the Holy Spirit in the testimonies of Scripture and of those believers.

Then the Lord **redirects** Saul with a command, *“But get up and stand on your feet;”* (Acts 26:16a). It was the same command the Lord gave Ezekiel when He appeared to him, *“stand on your feet that I may speak with you”* (Ez. 2:1). At the sight of the Lord’s blinding appearance, Saul, like Ezekiel in the OT, like John on Patmos, had fallen to the ground. You may have been in a traditional school classroom where the teacher addresses one of the seated students saying, “Please stand up,” and then commends, corrects, reprimands, or gives directions. The Lord commanded Saul to **get up and stand on his feet**, ready to respond to redirection for His purposes.

*“. . . for this purpose I have appeared to you, to appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you;”* (Acts 26:16).

**Jesus chose and called Saul to be a minister** –that is, “an underling, a servant”<sup>4</sup>– **and a witness** of what he had seen. At that moment, Saul **saw with his own eyes** the risen Lord Jesus Himself, the resurrected and ascended into Heaven and glorified Jesus.“

*“. . . but also to the things in which I will appear to you;”* (v. 16b) . . . Saul had much to learn. He would minister and witness to truths that **Jesus Himself would teach him** about Himself and His Kingdom.

---

<sup>4</sup> Strong’s Concordance 5257, *hupéreté*, Bible Hub, <https://biblehub.com/greek/5257.htm>.

**“Paul”, being Saul’s Greek name** by which most of us know him, wrote to the Galatian Christians, and said, *“But when God . . . was pleased to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went away to Arabia, and returned once more to Damascus. Then three years later I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas (Peter), and stayed with him fifteen days. But I did not see any other of the apostles except James, the Lord’s brother. (Now in what I am writing to you, I assure you before God that I am not lying.)* (Gal. 1:15-20) NASB

**All that to say, Paul** was not taught by Jesus’ disciples or the apostles. Rather he was taught **by Jesus Himself** for **three years**. This was Paul’s unique experience and as such, Paul was not inferior to any of the other apostles who for no more than three years themselves knew and learned from Jesus.

**Additionally**, Jesus said to him, you are **under My protection** from the Jews and the Gentiles. Paul would face persistent opposition from the Jews as he proclaimed Jesus the Nazarene as the Jewish Messiah. The Gentiles, who worshiped other gods, would also oppose him and his message.

**And speaking of the Gentiles**, Jesus said, *“I am sending you to them, . . . <sup>18</sup> to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.”* (Acts 26:18) NASB.

Jesus sent Paul –a Jew of Jews, a Hebrew of Hebrews, a Pharisee of Pharisees– to the Gentiles. The Gentiles are that broad group of people who are not Jews.

Paul later reminded the **Ephesian** Gentiles that before knowing Christ, they were *“. . . separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world”* (Ephesians 2:12) NASB.

We don’t have to go very far to find **people** who are **separated from Christ, who have no hope**, and who are **without God** in the world. They are **strangers to the gospel** of Christ –people who live in darkness and under the deception and control of Satan. These are people who demonstrate by their actions, thoughts, and words, their rejection of God and their ignorance of His word. They are adrift upon their own imaginations and superstitions, and as Scripture says, *“they don’t know over what they stumble”* (Prov. 4:19).

The Lord sent Paul to the Gentiles **to include them**, that is all of us, in His family and His kingdom – *that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in [Christ]*.

That was **how** Saul met the risen and ascended and glorified Lord Jesus. He continues his narrative by describing his life **after** knowing the Lord:

*“So, King Agrippa, I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision, but kept declaring both to those of Damascus first, and also at Jerusalem and then throughout all the region of Judea, and even to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance. For this reason some Jews seized me in the temple and tried to put me to death. So, having obtained help from God, I stand to this day testifying both to small and great,*

*stating nothing but what the Prophets and Moses said was going to take place; that the Christ was to suffer, and that by reason of His resurrection from the dead He would be the first to proclaim light both to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles.”* (Acts 26:19-23)

At this point, there were **two responses** to Paul’s defense:

**The first response** was an interruption, a spontaneous exclamation: *“While Paul was saying this in his defense, Festus said in a loud voice, ‘Paul, you are out of your mind! Your great learning is driving you mad.’”* (Acts 26:24)

To Festus, Paul’s words, **especially his mention of the suffering of Christ and the resurrection**, seemed to be those of someone who was crazy –out of his mind. *“But Paul said, ‘I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus, but I utter words of sober truth.’”* (Acts 26:25)

Paul redirects his address to King Agrippa and calls from him a response of faith: *“For the king knows about these matters, and I speak to him also with confidence, since I am persuaded that none of these things escape his notice; for this has not been done in a corner. King Agrippa, do you believe the Prophets? I know that you do.”* (Acts 26:26-27)

King Agrippa responded: *“In a short time you will persuade me to become a Christian”* (Acts 26:28) NASB. *“And Paul replied, ‘I would wish to God that whether in a short or long time, not only you, but also all who hear me this day, might become such as I am, except for these chains.’”* (Acts 26:29)

The **meeting concluded** as King Agrippa, his sister Bernice, Governor Festus, and those who were sitting with them stood up, *“and when they had gone aside, they began talking to one another, saying, ‘This man is not doing anything worthy of death or imprisonment.’ And Agrippa said to Festus, ‘This man might have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar.’”* (Acts 26:30-32)

**Because Paul had appealed to Caesar**, from that day **he was sent to Rome**, marking the beginning of what is called his Fourth Missionary Journey.

**What is the main point of this passage?** The Risen Lord Jesus redeems sinful men for His purposes and changes lives even today.

**Application:** What does that mean for us? The Lord Jesus is alive. He is the very Lord God who dwells in unapproachable light, the very mention of Whom should strike reverent awe and respect and submission in our hearts, just as His appearance did to Saul. The story, told three times in Scripture, tells us again that Christ Redeems Sinful Men for His purposes.

Knowing all that, should we expect the Lord Jesus to appear to us as He did to Saul **in Light** brighter than the sun and **speak words** that forever change our lives? Before we imagine we need a similar appearance of the Lord to have a life-changing encounter with Christ, let’s keep in mind that after the brilliant light of the Lord’s appearance, Saul was blind for three days. Keep in mind also that Jesus will appear again in like fashion, as lightning flashes from east to west, and on that occasion, every eye will see Him. But at that moment the day of decision will have passed, and destinies will be sealed.

So **first**, instead of a brilliant flash of light from heaven, we and **all persons** need the brilliant flash of that Light of understanding of Who Christ is. Even more illuminating than physical light, which can blind the eyes, is **that Light of understanding in the heart** and mind. Paul wrote the Corinthians, **“For God, who said, ‘Light shall shine out of darkness,’ is the One who has shown in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ”** (2 Cor. 4:4-6).

God gives us light to understand that **Jesus is the brilliance of the glory of God**, and we can know Him through the eyes of faith.

**Secondly**, Jesus changed Paul’s life by His appearance, **but He chose to change other lives** through Paul’s testimony of what he had seen and what was revealed to him, and Jesus continues to change other lives through the written record of His Word today. **“I . . . appoint you a minister and a witness not only to the things which you have seen, but also to the things in which I will appear to you”** (Acts 26:16).

Paul declared before Agrippa that the testimony of all he had seen was according to the Old Testament Scriptures –**“stating nothing but what the Prophets and Moses said was going to take place”** (Acts 26:22) NASB. Paul summarized those OT prophesies of the Prophets and Moses **“that the Christ was to suffer, and that by reason of His resurrection from the dead He would be the first to proclaim light both to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles”** (Acts 26:23).

Jesus changes lives today through the testimony of **facts according to the Scriptures** to which Paul bore witness: Christ would suffer, and Christ would be raised from the dead.

**Thirdly**, Jesus laid out the **results** that He desired –**“to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me”** (Acts 26:18).

Jesus sent Paul to the Gentiles **to open their eyes** –a description of the awakening and illuminating power of the Gospel. To open their eyes presumes that those without Christ are spiritually blind **“. . . the god of this world (Satan) has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God”** (2 Cor. 4:3-4).

**Blind Man's Bluff** is a traditional game that has been around for probably hundreds of years and is played by children all over the world. You’ve probably played it! There are numerous variations, but usually, one child is blindfolded with a soft scarf, and then gently spun around a few times so that they lose their sense of direction. The other children move around the "blind" player, calling out to them. Sooner or later the "blind" player will catch someone, then the blindfold is tied around that child's eyes and the game starts again. Of course, the area of play must be free of obstacles that could cause the blindfolded player to fall or get hurt.<sup>5</sup> **Opening the eyes** is like when the child who gropes and stumbles around blindfolded, takes the blindfold off, and sees clearly again.

We must open our eyes and clearly see the **FACTS** –Human depravity and sin, the domination of the usurper Satan, and the hope of redemption and salvation in Christ. Opening of the eyes is a result Jesus desires! Once we see these facts clearly, we must make a volitional choice –**to turn** from

---

<sup>5</sup> Help My Kid Learn, *Blind Man’s Bluff*, <https://www.helpmykidlearn.ie/activities/3-4/detail/blind-mans-bluff>.

darkness to light, from the dominion of Satan to God. It's a matter of **the will**, also called **repentance**— a 180° turn about-face from darkness to light, from the dominion of Satan to God.

What is the difference between darkness and light? In Plato's *Allegory of the Cave*, the ancient Greek philosopher depicts people chained to a low wall in a cave all their lives. Behind them lies a thoroughfare for people to pass through and a raised fire that casts shadows on the wall. The shadows are the only way the prisoners can experience the wider world, and to them they represent reality. But one prisoner escapes, and when he returns to explain to the other prisoners the real world is far greater than the dark shadows, the prisoners reject offers to free them, for they cannot imagine the world being so different.<sup>6</sup>

Some choose spiritual darkness instead of light, not knowing over what they stumble, yet not willing to walk by faith in Christ, knowing and relying on His Spirit and the light of His Word to guide. Turning from darkness to light is a matter of the will! You must choose to turn and repent!

How do we compare the dominion of Satan to God? **Satan** comes like a thief, **"to steal and to kill and to destroy."** **Jesus** came to give life, and that more abundantly (John 10:10)! **Satan tempts** us to be indifferent to Christ, to scoff in stubborn unbelief, to be addicted to alcohol, to food, to gambling and the lottery, to be addicted to pornography and illicit sex, to dabble in the horoscope and the occult. Satan's schemes are like the fishing lure that floats downstream at the end of a line. The lure appeals to the trout below, but little does he know there is a sharp hook concealed inside, and once the fish bites, he's caught! Satan wants to hook us and draw us under his dominion to do his will in sin. **Jesus** sets us free and gives us abundant life! This is a result Jesus desires! We must choose to reject and resist temptation, turn and repent, and be freed from Satan's dominion!

Once we turn and repent, then we can freely **receive forgiveness of sins**—forgiveness of sins which is **not** deserved, **not** earned, but freely given **and must be received**. This too, is a result Jesus died for and desires for us!

**"It's a Wonderful Life"** is a 1946 American dramatic Christmas film directed by Frank Capra. In one scene, George Baily is a young boy working in Old Man Gower's drug store. Mr. Gower receives a telegram informing him of his son Robert's sudden death due to influenza. Grief-stricken, he lays the open telegram on the cash register and goes into the apothecary (pharmacy) to fill a prescription. George reads the open telegram and follows Mr. Gower into the pharmacy to see if he can be of help. He watches as with shaking hands Mr. Gower mistakenly fills the prescription for diphtheria with pills from a bottle labeled "poison" and gives it to George to deliver immediately to Mrs. Blaine. When George hesitates and delays delivering the erroneous prescription, Mr. Gower begins to berate him and beat him about the ears. But when he finally realizes his error, Mr. Gower falls on his knees in tears thanking George and begging his forgiveness.

The psalmist David said, **"How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered! How blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit!"** (Psalm 32:1-2).

---

<sup>6</sup> Kevin Freeman, "Bearers of Light," daily devotional in "Open Windows," (Lifeway Christian Resources of the Southern Baptist Convention, Winter 2023-24, Vol. 88 – Number 2), Saturday, February 10.

In addition to receiving forgiveness of sins, there is **an inheritance** to be received –an *inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Christ*– an inheritance that includes adoption into God’s family, and the promise and certain **hope of eternal life**.

**How is that inheritance received?** *By faith in Me*, Jesus said. They are *sanctified*, that is, “set apart,” by Faith in Christ alone!

These are all **results that Jesus desires**.

- **Christian**, when witnessing to the risen Lord Jesus, **witness to the facts** according to Scripture –Christ died for our sins, and Christ rose from the dead.
- Then **call for the results** that Jesus desires –that hearers might *open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Christ*.

**You who are not Christians**, if the Lord has **RESTRAINED** you in your pursuit of sin, has **REBUKED** you for your stubborn unbelief and resistance to the Holy Spirit, then fall on your knees and with tears, **REPENT**, receive His forgiveness, and then stand up on your feet and let Him **REDIRECT** your life for His purposes and for your good.

**Governor Festus** scoffed at the idea of the suffering Christ and the resurrection.

**King Agrippa** had a near encounter with the Lord Jesus and was almost persuaded to believe the truth. But we have no record he ever repented of sin and unbelief and was sanctified by faith in Christ.

**Charles Colson**, on the other hand, turned and repented from his former career of dirty political tricks to serve Christ and His kingdom.

**Paul**, restrained, rebuked, and redirected by the risen Lord Jesus, was not disobedient to the heavenly vision. Through Paul, the Gospel spread to Asia Minor and was introduced to Europe. The persecutor and destroyer of the early church planted new churches all along the way. Of the 27 books of the NT, 13 are generally agreed to be attributed to Paul, and the Holy Spirit’s preservation of His written witness still results in changed lives today.

**And You**, upon hearing these **words of sober truth**, if the Lord is restraining you in your headlong rush to sin, if He is rebuking you for your unbelief and resistance to the Holy Spirit, then turn and **REPENT**, and He will Redirect your life for His purposes and His glory and your good. I invite you to Get up and stand on your feet. Make it inevitable. Make it public. And then in obedience, perform deeds appropriate to repentance.